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ABSTRACT

This study a) determined college students' perceptions of selected women's roles and female sport involvement and b) ascertained the association of selected sociocultural characteristics with perceptions of women's roles and female sport involvement. Two hundred seventy-nine undergraduates at the University of Massachusetts completed a test inventory which included a questionnaire, a semantic differential, and a variation of the Lifestyle and Perspective Index. Analysis revealed that undergraduates have distinct perceptions of the six women's roles studied, but not of the selected sports. Sex and cosmopolitanism were the sociocultural characteristics significantly related to perceptions of women's roles. Regardless of the sociocultural characteristics studied, however, the roles of "woman athlete" and "woman professor" were perceived as the most potent and active roles and the least highly evaluated roles for women. Only "cosmopolitanism" was statistically significant in differentiating perceptions of female involvement in selected sports. (Seven tables of statistical data were included along with a two-page bibliography.) (Author/BRB)

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PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S ROLES AND FEMALE SPORT INVOLVEMENT AMONG A SELECTED SAMPLE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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This paper is based upon a Master's Degree Thesis completed by the author at the University of Massachusetts in 1972, under the direction of Dr. John W. Loy, Jr.

PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S ROLES AND FEMALE SPORT INVOLVEMENT AMONG A SELECTED SAMPLE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

Introduction

Several studies have substantiated the contention that clearly defined and generally accepted sex role stereotypes continue to exist in the United States today. Broverman (1) Rosenkrantz (10), Sheriffs and Jarrett (11), and Steinman (12) have shown that these stereotypes encompass distinct physical, psychological, and sociological characteristics which are perceived as associated with each sex. Additionally, this research has shown that the traits associated with male behavior are perceived as more desirable by both men and women. Thus, traits such as aggressiveness, independence, strength, and competitiveness, commonly perceived as male characteristics, are more socially desirable than female traits such as passivity, cooperativeness, talkativeness, and nurturance.

Just as there are behavioral traits associated with each sex, there are also activities commonly classified as female or male. Among the several activities commonly associated with male behavior is sport. The characteristics of a superior athlete or even a serious lower level competitor are clearly more consistent with the male stereotype than the female stereotype. Thus, Sutton-Smith (13), Brown (2), and Hall (3) have shown that sport is often perceived as an activity which is inconsistent with the prevailing concept of appropriate female behavior.

Studies of actual personality traits completed by Ogilvie and Tutko (7), Peterson (9), Ibrahim (5), and Landers (6) on female athletes have failed to show any defined consensus of characteristics that differentiate this group from female non-athletes. However, investigations of the perceived traits of female athletes have shown a definite tendency to

attribute stereotype behavior to this group. Not surprisingly, these perceived traits are inconsistent with the accepted female stereotype. (Brown (2), Hall (3), and Harris (4).

Purpose of the Investigation

The results of these several investigations of sex role stereotypes and female sport involvement form the basis for the present study. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to answer the following questions:

1. How do college students perceive certain women's roles?
2. Do particular social categories of college student differentially perceive women's roles?
3. How do college students perceive female involvement in selected sports?
4. Do particular social categories of college students differentially perceive female involvement in selected sports?

Procedure

Selection Of The Sample The subjects for this investigation were 279 undergraduate males and females at the University of Massachusetts.

Selection Of The Test Instrument The test instrument consisted of four parts:

1. A semantic differential consisting of fifteen bipolar scales to determine perceptions of six female roles: Housewife, Woman Athletic, Woman professor, Mother, Girlfriend, and Ideal Woman.
2. Nineteen selected sports each followed by a Likert Seven Step Scale to determine the perceived appropriateness of each sport for female participation.
3. A questionaire to identify the sociocultural characteristics of: sex, major field of study, class in school, previous sport experience, head of the household's education, religious preference, race, and political preference.

4. A modification of Thielbar's (14) Lifestyle and Perspective Index to determine degree of cosmopolitanism. This consisted of thirty statements each followed by a Likert five step scale between agree and disagree.

Data Analysis A multiple discriminant function analysis was completed to determine the perceptions of the roles and sport involvement in relation to the various sociocultural traits.

Results

Question One: How do college students perceive certain women's roles?

Bipolar scales on the semantic differential have consistently clustered into three major groups in factor analysis work by Osgood (8) and others. Osgood identified these three clusters as evaluative, potency, and activity factors. Thus, when scales are selected which cluster into one of each of the three factor groups, a three dimensional representation of the perceptions of each role is formulated. The attitude toward each role is indicated by scales representing the evaluative factor, while the activity and potency perceived as associated with each role is indicated on the scales representing these two factors. The scales used in the present study were as follows:

Evaluative: Attractive-Unattractive, Sexually Attractive, Sexually Unattractive, Nice-Awful, Interesting-Boring, Affectionate-Cold.

Potency: Thick-Thin, Masculine-Feminine, Intelligent-Unintelligent, Hard-Soft, Heavy-Light.

Activity: Tense-Relaxed, Loud-Soft, Competitive-Cooperative, Experimental-Conservative, Fast-Slow.

Perceptions By Factors When the college student's perceptions of the roles on the evaluative, potency, and activity factors was studied, the rank order of the roles was quite different for the evaluative factor than for the potency and activity factors.

Evaluative	Potency	Activity
Ideal Woman	Woman Professor	Woman Athlete
Girlfriend	Woman Atnlete	Woman Professor
Mother	Mother	Ideal Woman
Housewife	Housewife	Housewife
Woman Professor	Ideal Woman	Girlfriend
Woman Athlete	Girlfriend	Mother

The Ideal Woman was perceived as the most highly evaluated role while the Woman Athlete was perceived as the least highly evaluated role. However, on the potency factor, the Woman Professor and Woman Athlete, both lowly evaluated roles, were perceived as the most potent of those investigated. The Ideal Woman and Girlfriend were perceived as the least potent. The activity factor showed that the Woman Athlete and Woman Professor were again ranked highest of those studied. Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between factors supported the statement that, for the roles under investigation, there was a negative relaionship between evaluation of the role and both the activity and potency perceived in a role. Consequently, the roles perceived as highly evaluated were perceived as low in potency and activity and those perceived as highly potent and active were perceived as the least highly evaluated.

Perceptions Of The Roles On The Three Factors Simultaneously

In order to see the relationship of each role to all other roles as a total perception rather than as separate factors, Osgood (8) suggested the use of the generalized distance formula of plane geometry. Thus, the relationship of each role, as a total perception, to all other roles can be represented in D matrix and resulting D Model. The D model shows the distance of each role from all other roles in semantic space.

As can be seen, the roles cluster into three dyad: (1) Ideal Woman and Girlfriend (2) Mother and Housewife (3) Woman Professor and Woman Athlete. The Woman Athlete as perceived as the farthest in semantic space from the ideal woman of the six roles studied. If the Ideal Woman is

D MATRIX AND D MODEL OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SIX WOMEN'S ROLES BY THE TOTAL SAMPLE.

	HW	WA	GF	WP	M	IW
HW	-	8.18	6.32	4.69	2.23	8.24
WA		-	12.44	4.12	10.67	13.96
GF			-	9.89	4.58	2.00
WP				-	6.40	11.57
M					-	6.40
IW						-

accepted as the ultimate preferred role for women, then the Woman Athlete was perceived as the least desirable role for women of those studied.

These findings fully support the findings of other researchers in that (1) there is a definite perception of desirable traits for a woman and these traits are consistent with the roles of Ideal Woman, Girlfriend and Mother. (2) The traits associated with the role of Woman Athlete are perceived as inconsistent with the traits associated with the preferred roles of Ideal Woman and Girlfriend.

Question Two: Do particular social categories of College Students differentially perceive women's roles?

Of the various social categories, only two, sex and cosmopolitanism were significantly (.01) related to perceptions of the women's roles.

Sex Within this social category the most striking differences occured on the evaluative factor. The males ranked the Woman Athlete higher than did the females on the evaluative factor, while the females ranked the Woman Professor higher than the males did. Though there were some differences in the perceptions of activity and potency in the roles, generally males and females agreed as to the activity and potency associated with these roles. This relationship indicated that, since the activity and potency associated with the roles by males and females was similar, the difference is their attitude toward the desirability of active and potent traits in a woman's role.

Cosmopolitanism The major differences in the perceptions of the low, moderate, and high cosmopolitans also occured on the evaluative factor. However, all three degrees of cosmopolitanism regarded the Woman Athlete as the least highly evaluated role. All three also perceived the Woman Athlete and Woman Professor as the most active and potent roles.

TABLE . RANKED ROLE MEAN SCORES FOR EACH FACTOR FOR THE SOCIAL CATEGORY OF SEX AND RANK ORDER CORRELATIONS BETWEEN FACTORS.

Males n = 128

Evaluative		Potency		Activity	
IW	32.85	WP	21.85	WA	24.35
GF	31.46	WA	21.00	WP	21.88
M	25.90	M	18.50	IW	18.64
HW	25.90	HW	17.67	HW	18.52
WA	22.07	IW	16.17	GF	18.32
WP	21.59	GF	16.03	M	17.97

Factor	Spearman r
Evaluative-Potency	-.87
Evaluative-Activity	-.54
Potency-Activity	.55

Females n = 151

Evaluative		Potency		Activity	
IW	31.96	WA	21.97	WA	26.43
GF	29.59	WP	21.82	WP	21.87
M	27.42	HW	18.52	IW-HW	18.74
WP	23.37	M	18.45	GF	18.39
HW	23.06	IW	17.23	M	17.68
WA	21.01	GF	17.14		

Factor	Spearman r
Evaluative-Potency	-.88
Evaluative-Activity	.54
Potency-Activity	.55

RANKED ROLE MEAN SCORES FOR EACH FACTOR FOR THE SOCIAL CATEGORY OF LOCAL-COSMOPOLITANISM AND RANK ORDER CORRELATIONS BETWEEN FACTORS.

Low Cosmopolitanism n = 43

Evaluative		Potency		Activity	
IW	31.25	WP	21.04	WA	25.25
GF	29.86	WA	20.86	WP	21.46
M	27.93	M	18.44	IW	19.95
WP	24.34	HW	18.79	HW	19.46
HW	24.11	IW	17.88	GF	19.13
WA	22.55	GF	18.00	M	17.76

Factor	Spearman r
Evaluative-Potency	-.83
Evaluative-Activity	-.48
Potency-Activity	.55

Moderate Cosmopolitanism n= 191

Evaluative		Potency		Activity	
IW	32.40	WP	21.95	WA	25.62
GF	30.45	WA	21.52	WP	22.04
M	26.43	M	18.62	IW	18.89
HW	23.51	HW	18.07	HW	18.62
WP	22.37	IW	16.72	GF	18.59
WA	21.26	GF	16.39	M	18.14

Factor	Spearman r
Evaluative-Potency	-.83
Evaluative-Activity	-.60
Potency-Activity	.55

High Cosmopolitanism n = 41

Evaluative		Potency		Activity	
IW	33.26	WA	22.17	WA	25.08
GF	31.04	WP	22.08	WP	21.55
HW	26.97	M	17.88	HW	17.95
M	26.80	HW	17.77	IW	16.68
WP	21.32	GF	16.33	GF	16.60
WA	21.46	IW	15.89	M	16.51

Factor	Spearman r
Evaluative=Potency	1.00
Evaluative=Activity	.60
Potency= Activity	.63

Question Three: How do college students perceive female involvement in selected sports?

None of the sports studied were perceived as inappropriate for female participation. The rank ordering of sports showed that tennis, swimming, gymnastics, bowling, and snow skiing were perceived as the most appropriate of those studied. Crew, squash, handball, track, and skydiving were seen as the least appropriate for female participation of those studied.

Question Four: Do particular social categories of college students differentially perceive female involvement in selected sports?

Of the social categories studied, only cosmopolitanism was significantly (.01) related to perception of female involvement in selected sports. The sports which differentiated between cosmopolitanism to the greatest extent were crew, fencing, and handball. Generally, tennis, gymnastics, and swimming were ranked highest by all three groups while squash and crew were consistently ranked least appropriate.

Conclusions

The most striking conclusions reached as a result of this investigation centered around the answers to questions one and two.

1. There was inverse relationship between the evaluation of women's roles and the degree of activity and potency associated with the roles. If a role is highly evaluated it tended to be perceived as low in potency and activity and vice versa.

2. Of the social categories studied only sex and cosmopolitanism were significantly related to differential perceptions of the six wonen's roles.

3. Though individual roles may have been perceived differently by the various social categories, the inverse relationship between evaluation of the role and activity and potency of the role tended to persist.

MEAN SCORES OF EACH SPORT FOR THE TOTAL SAMPLE.

Sport	Mean
Tennis	1.34
Swimming	1.39
Gymnastics	1.40
Bowling	1.49
Snow Skiing	1.49
Volleyball	1.52
Sailing	1.55
Softball	1.74
Golf	1.79
Judo	1.84
Field Hockey	1.84
Baseketball	2.03
Fencing	2.03
Skydiving	2.05
Track	2.06
Handball	2.37
Squash	2.61
Crew	2.82

RANKED SPORT MEANS FOR THE SOCIAL CATEGORY OF LOCAL-COSMOPOLITAN ORIENTATION.

Low Cosmopolitans		Moderate Cosmopolitans	
Sport	Mean	Sport	Mean
Skiing	1.24	Tennis	1.37
Tennis	1.31	Swimming	1.41
Swimming	1.35	Gymnastics	1.44
Bowling	1.42	Sailing	1.52
Volleyball	1.44	Volleyball	1.55
Gymnastics	1.44	Skiing	1.58
Softball	1.75	Bowling	1.58
Field Hockey	1.80	Golf	1.74
Sailing	1.97	Softball	1.77
Golf	2.11	Judo	1.86
Judo	2.15	Fencing	1.89
Track	2.28	Field Hockey	1.90
Basketball	2.35	Skydiving	2.06
Skydiving	2.57	Basketball	2.06
Squash	3.02	Track	2.06
Fencing	3.08	Handball	2.32
Handball	3.24	Squash	2.66
Crew	4.22	Crew	2.72

High Cosmopolitans

Sport	Mean
Bowling	1.17
Gymnastics	1.19
Sailing	1.19
Tennis	1.21
Swimming	1.34
Skiing	1.34
Judo	1.41
Fencing	1.43
Skydiving	1.46
Volleyball	1.48
Basketball	1.51
Field Hockey	1.58
Softball	1.58
Handball	1.63
Golf	1.68
Crew	1.75
Track	1.80
Squash	1.92

In summary, an inconsistency exists between the traditional female behavioral stereotype as represented by the roles of Girlfriend and Ideal Woman, and the non-traditional female roles of Woman Athlete and Woman Professor. The evaluation of a woman's role appears to depend upon it's association with traits consistent with the concepts of activity and potency. Consequently, this study indicates that being a woman and being perceived as active and potent are incompatible attributes.

The implications of such a finding is, inspite of popular claims to the contrary, that appropriate female behavior continues to be sharply delimited. Until such time that a more androgenous attitude toward appropriate female and male behaviors and activities prevails, a woman who chooses to display the role traits of activity and potency will tend to be perceived in a negative manner.

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